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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes the results of a statewide survey (excluding New York City) on the objectives, procedures, and problems of school closing; it emphasizes school districts' planning processes. The report begins with information on the geographic distribution of closings; the years districts closed schools; and the types, sizes, and ages of the schools closed. It then closed schools, and the types, sizes, and ages of the schools closed. It then analyzes the use of various planning activities identified in the survey; two discussed in some detail are the use of advisory committees and of guidelines, reported by 62.6 and 69 percent of the districts, respectively. The final section reports the indidence of unanticipated problems due to school closings and the districts' satisfaction with their planning procedures. Eleven appended tables provide data on all the above topics and supporting information; a New York State map is also included, showing the distribution of studied districts by county. The attached booklet presents essentially the same information as the paper described above, but draws more detailed conclusions. (MCG)

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SCHOOL CLOSINGS IN NEW YORK STATE: THE PLANNING PROCESS

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Bay Shore Public Schools

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Paper Presented at the 1984 Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in New Orleans, Louisiana, April 1984

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ABSTRACT

As public school district enrollments decline school officials seek ways to reduce operating costs and deal with underutilized space. The option selected in many districts is that of closing schools. This paper reports the planning procedures used in 169 school closings that took place between September 1973 and September 1982 in New York State and the perceived effectiveness of those procedures in terms of achieving objectives set by district officials and their willingness to use the same or similar procedures in future closings.

School Closings in New York State:

The Planning Process

Of the challenges that have faced educators in the last decade few have received more attention than that of declining enrollments in public schools. Having survived the years of expanding school populations and the concomitant concern for classrooms to house the ever-growing numbers of students, school officials in the Seventies found themselves with a dwindling number of students and emptying classrooms.

Seldom lacking an article on enrollment decline, educational journals during the last decade testify to the considerable concern felt by educators for this problem. These articles range from reports by educational practitioners generously willing to share their experiences with others facing the same dilemmas, to studies produced by writers in universities and other research-oriented settings. With much of this literature dealing with planning for school closings, very little focuses on the effectiveness of these procedures in bringing about the hoped-for results or on the emergence of problems unanticipated by the planners.

Particularly hard hit by decreasing numbers of students, New York State experienced a 19.8 percent decline in student enrollment between 1973 and 1981 (see Table 1) (New York State Education Department, 1982a), while nation-wide school enrollments declined 11.5 percent (Frankel, 1982) in the same period. During that period, rising inflation, increased energy costs, and additional public expectations for schools (Gallup, 1981) combined to increase district budgets despite the smaller numbers of students enrolled. As enrollments declined, however, taxpayers expected a corresponding decline in the cost of operating school districts. One of the

most difficult tasks school officials in declining-enrollment districts must perform is explaining to residents why shrinking enrollments are not accompanied by shrinking costs (Neill, 1979). Keough (1978, p. 332) labels this expectation of the public a "myth".

> The economics are disheartening and bewildering. If the cost of educating 1,000 children is $ 1 million, then, when enrollment drops to 500, the district budget and school tax should theoretically reflect a 50 percent reduction. This just doesn't happen; the budget figures and the tax rate stay the same, or even go up. Communities find it hard to realize that had enrollment stayed at the same 1,000 pupil level, the new costs would by now have escalated to $ 1.5 million.... That lowered enrollments equal budget decreases is a great myth. It is understood to be a myth by school administrators and board members, but not by taxpayers.

Insert Table 1 About

Here

Faced, then, with a sharp decline in the number of students in the schools and a steep rise in district budgets, New York State residents became increasingly reluctant to approve raising school-tax rates and, in many areas, responded by voting down school budget referenda. For example, in six of the years covered by this study, nearly a quarter of all school-district budget votes in New York State resulted in defeat (see Table 2) (New York State Education Department, 1982b). In such situations, district officials, finding themselves in the unenviable position of having to balance fewer students, an inflationary economic situation, and the opposition if not outright hostility of taxpayers, searched for ways to reduce district costs in order to pacify district residents. Of the several methods of dealing with declining enrollments, many school district officials selected the option of closing school

buildings, viewing it as a means of reducing operating costs in their districts.

Insert Table 2 About

Here

Methodology

A personal letter and a survey questionnaire of 55 items were sent to the superintendents of 252 New York State school districts (excluding New York City because of the size and complexity of its school system) that had closed schools between 1973 and 1981. Items 13-23 of the questionnaire elicited information about the objectives the district hoped to achieve and the components of the school closing process. Information was also sought concerning respondents' willingness to use in future closings those components used in the closing reported for this study. Additionally, in an open-ended question, respondents were asked to report unanticipated problems connected with the school closing.

The most recent school closing in each district that had closed schools was the object of examination in this study. Of the 252 districts identified by the New York State Education Department as having closed schools, slightly more than half (129) had closed only one school in the time period considered here, while 123 had closed more than one. Owing to the large number of closings in some districts (12 districts had experienced from six to 22 closings), the anticipated lack of information regarding each closing, and the possible change in central office personnel, the most recent closing in each of the 252 districts that closed schools was selected for study. It was assumed that by seeking information regarding only the

most recent closing, more accurate information would be available, and it was thought to be more likely that the superintendent contacted would have been in the district at the time of the closing.

The initial mailing was posted early in November 1982. One month later a second letter was sent to non-respondents, and in mid-January 1983 certified letters were mailed to the 68 superintendents who still had not returned the questionnaire.

Responses were received from 218 of the 252 districts that had closed schools, representing a response rate of 86.5 percent. Questionnaire responses generated information about additional closings taking place after September 1981, and this information was incorporated into the study, extending the period covered to September 1982. Of the responding districts, 39 reported having no closings owing to declining enrollments, while ten respondents provided unusable information. The study is based, therefore, on responses from 169 districts (67.1%) of the sample of 252. The responding districts are scattered across New York State, located in urban, suburban, and rural areas.

The largest number of responses came from the counties of Nassau (23), Suffolk (18), and Westchester (14), all near New York City, and Erie County (12), in which the city of Buffalo is located. Clustered in the downstate area then are 55 responses (32.5%) and 12 (7.1%) in the Buffalo area, making a total of 39.6 percent of the responding districts tightly grouped in these two population centers of the state. These four counties have 25.6 percent of the state's population (U. S. Department of Commerce, 1981). Of the districts from which no responses were received (34), 29.4 percent (10) are in these same four counties. The map (see Appendix) shows the number of districts providing usable responses in each county in the

state, as well as the number of districts from which no responses were received. Of the ten counties in which no closings occurred (marked NC on the map), six are in the less-populated northeastern section of the state, with the remaining four scattered throughout the rest of the state.

As the aim of this study was to provide a broad picture of school closing procedures in New York State rather than a comparison of districts or correlation of variables, it was appropriate to use descriptive statistics - frequencies and percentages.

Results

Almost 70 percent of the districts reported their most recent closing occurred during the last five years, with almost one-fourth of the most recent closings taking place in the 1981-82 school year (see Table 3). The number of schools closed in a district in the most recent year with closings ranged from one closing in 143 districts to four closings in each of four districts. Elementary schools in the responding districts declined in number from 1046 in 1971 to 724 in 1981, a decrease of 30.8 percent. Senior high schools in the responding districts, however, increased in number from 175 to 180 during the same period. (Informal observations of school enrollment projections for the next few years in New York State suggest that secondary school enrollments will decline in number, creating underutilized space in that area, while elementary enrollments will increase. Elementary schools closed in recent years will be needed once again to house these increasing numbers of students.)

Insert Table 3 About

Here

More than 86 percent of the buildings most recently closed housed elementary grades in a variety of combinations, and of the buildings closed almost half were constructed prior to 1930 (see Table 4). Roughly half of the closed schools were built to house fewer than 350 students (see Table 5), although in the last year of operation, half the buildings closed had enrollments of fewer than 250 students (see Table 6). Nearly one-quarter of the reporting districts no longer had patterns of neighborhood schools.

Insert Tables 4, 5, and 6

About Here

More than half (53.9%) of the respondents reported that reducing costs was their most important objective in closing schools (see Table 7). Unable to select one "most important objective", 23.1 percent of the respondents selected several objectives, of which one was reducing costs. This objective, then, was among those reported by 77 percent of the respondents. In response to the question about the achievement of objectives, 97 percent indicated that their objectives were achieved.

Insert Table 7 About

Here

Given a list of 22 activities (components of the planning process) engaged in by districts closing schools, respondents were asked to indicate those they had used and would use in future closings, as well as ones they had used and would not use again (see Table 8). More than 85 percent of the districts examined their facilities, educational implications, staffing, and operating costs. Fewer than three percent indicated they would not do so again in the future. Meetings with community and staff groups were

held in roughly 75 percent of the districts, while other activities of a public relations nature were engaged in to a lesser degree. Again, fewer than three percent of the respondents would avoid these activities in future planning. Teachers' requests for reassignment to specific schools were honored in 63.8 percent of the districts. Almost five percent of the districts reported they would not honor such reassignment requests in future closings. Outside consultants were used in 25.2 percent of the districts; 4.3 percent reported they would not use consultants again.

Insert Table 8 About

Here

Advisory committees, made up mostly of parents and staff members, were organized in 63.6 percent of the districts (see Table 9). The decision to close a school rested with the advisory committee in 26 percent of the districts having such committees, while determining which school to close was a function in 24 percent (see Table 10). Gathering information to use in decision-making was a function of 78 percent of the committees; analyzing information furnished to them was a function of 84 percent. Three-fourths of the committees were charged with making recommendations for planning the closing. Two-thirds of the committees were formed to provide community residents with a sense of involvement in the school closing process. The length of time committees worked ranged from three months or less to more than two years. Almost half of the committees (49%) completed their work in less than one year.

Insert Tables 9 and 10

About Here

The recommendations of 85 percent of the advisory committees were followed by the districts completely or with some changes. No recommendations were made by 12 percent of the committees; three percent of the committees made recommendations that were not followed. Almost five percent of the districts that had advisory committees would not use them in planning for future closings.

Guidelines to be used in selecting a building to close were developed in 69 percent of the districts. In 37 percent of these districts the board of education and administrators developed the guidelines. Advisory committees participated with board members and administrators in 25 percent of the districts having guidelines.

Included in the guidelines in some 85 percent of the districts using them were consideration of space and facilities in the buildings, their enrollments, and their maintenance costs (see Table 11). The physical condition and age of the buildings were considerations in 75 percent. The desirability of the school site as marketable real estate was a factor in 31 percent of the guildelines developed; the real-estate value of the property in 28 percent.

Insert Table 11 About

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Of the districts that had previously closed schools, almost 80 percent reported using the same or similar procedures in their most recent closing (i.e., the one reported for this study), as they had used in an earlier closing or closings. Almost half the districts (48.8%) had developed long-range plans for closings at specific future times.

No unanticipated problems were reported to have emerged in 84 percent of the reporting districts. Districts (16%) experiencing problems for which they had not planned listed 39 items, which clustered roughly into 14 categories (see Table 12). The problems included, among others, difficulties in selling the no-longer-utilized property, listed by 9 (33.3%) of those responding to this question; crowded conditions, listed by 6 (22.2%) of the respondents to this question; white flight and vandalism, each indicated as unplanned-for problems by three respondents (11.1%).

Insert Table 12 About

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Although some districts reported dissatisfaction with portions of their planning procedures, indicating those portions (activities) would not be used in future planning, the overwhelming majority indicated that they would use the same or similar procedures in planning for future closings. This willingness to use procedures another time suggests that school officials were satisfied with the effectiveness of their procedures.

Given that respondents accurately reported their unanticipated problems and the successful achievement of objectives in closing schools, the conclusion can be drawn that the planning procedures used in New York State school districts that closed schools owing to declining enrollment were for the most part perceived to have been effective by the school officials who used them.

School closings are time consuming undertakings that may be costly, damaging to staff morale, likely to arouse community opposition, and the cause of board members' and superintendents' losing their positions. Before undertaking closings, school officials would be advised to make

themselves aware of planning procedures that have been found to be most effective by those who have used them, and thereby, it is to be hoped, minimize problems and maximize the benefits to be gained from the closings.

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TABLE 1

Public School Enrollment in New York State by Years

Year	Enrollment
1973-74	3,427,560
1974-75	3,401,626
1975-76	3,382,369
1976-77	3,307,231
1977-78	3,189,781
1978-79	3,060,911
1979-80	2,935,764
1980-81	2,838,393
1981-82	2,748,397
1982-83	2,683,598
1983-84	2,640,058 (preliminary)

TABLE 2

Percent of School Distric Budget Defeats

in New York State by Year

Year	Defeats
1972-73	18.5
1973-74	14.8
1974-75	23.4
1975-76	29.0
1975-77	22.5
1977-78	33.7
1978-79	14.0
1979-80	29.3
1980-81	22.6
1981-82	16.9
1982-83	12.7

TABLE 3

Year of Most Recent Closing

Year	Number of Districts	Percent
Prior to 1970-71	6	3.6
1970-71	2	1.2
1971-72	1	.6
1972-73	1	.6
1973-74	3	1.8
1974-75	4	2.4
1975-76	9	5.4
1976-77	13	7.7
1977-78	16	9.5
1978-79	21	12.5
1979-80	28	16.7
1980-81	20	11.9
1981-82	40	23.8
1982-83	4	2.4
Total (Missing Cases - 1)	168	100.1

TABLE 4

Decade of Construction of the School Most Recently Closed

Decade	Number of Districts	Percent
Before 1900	11	6.8
1900-1909	9	5.6
1910-1919	16	9.9
1920-1929	43	26.5
1930-1939	23	14.2
1940-1949	8	4.9
1950-1959	32	19.8
1960-1969	20	12.4
1970-1979	0	0
1980 or after	0	0
Total (Missing Cases - 7)	162	100.1

TABLE 5

Capacity of the School Most Recently Closed

Capacity	Number of Districts	Percent
Less than 100	11	6.6
100 - 149	11	6.6
150 - 199	15	8.9
200 - 249	14	8.3
250 - 299	17	10.1
300 - 349	14	8.3
350 - 399	7	4.2
400 - 449	8	4.8
450 - 499	10	6.0
500 - 549	10	6.0
550 - 599	11	6.6
600 - 649	7	4.2
650 - 699	5	3.0
700 - 749	5	3.0
750 - 799	5	3.0
800 - 849	4	2.4
850 - 899	0	0
900 - 949	2	1.2
950 - 999	4	2.4
1000 +	8	4.8
Total (Missing Cases - 1)	168	100.4

TABLE 6

Enrollment in the Last Year of Operation of the School Most Recently Closed

Enrollment	Number of Districts	Percent
Less than 100	21	12.7
100 - 149	18	10.9
150 - 199	18	10.9
200 - 249	25	15.2
250 - 299	15	9.1
300 - 349	16	9.7
350 - 399	10	6.1
400 - 449	12	7.3
450 - 499	9	5.5
500 - 549	7	4.2
550 - 599	2	1.2
600 - 649	6	3.6
650 - 699	1	.6
700 - 749	2	1.2
750 - 799	1	.6
800 - 849	0	0
850 - 899	0	0
900 - 949	0	0
950 - 999	1	.6
1000 +	1	.6
Total (Missing Cases - 4)	165	100.0

TABLE 7

Most Important Objective to be Gained

by Closing a School

Objective	Number of Districts	Percent
Reduce Costs	91	53.9
Close Inadequate Facility	15	8.9
Improve Instruction	12	7.1
Improve Racial Integration	5	3.0
Combination of Objectives	39	23.1
Others	7	4.1
Total	169	100.1

TABLE 8

Activities in the School-Closing Planning Process

Activites	Used, Would Use Again(%)		Used, May Use Again(%)		Used, Would Not Use Again(%)		Not Used(%)		Not Used Would Use (%)		Total(%)	
1. Examined Facilities	145	(89.0)	3	(1.8)	3	(1.8)	11	(6.7)	1	(.6)	163	(99.9)
2. Examined Educational Implications	144	(88.3)	3	(1.8)	1	(.6)	13	(8.0)	2	(1.2)	163	(99.9)
3. Analyzed Staffing Needs	137	(84.0)	3	(1.8)	4	(2.5)	17	(10.4)	2	(1.2)	163	(99.9)
4. Examined Operating Costs	134	(82.2)	3	(1.8)	4	(2.5)	21	(12.9)	1	(.6)	163	(100.)
5. Analyzed Busing Route Changes	124	(76.0)	2	(1.2)	6	(3.7)	29	(17.8)	2	(1.2)	163	(99.9)
6. Had Staff Meetings	119	(73.0)	1	(.6)	3	(1.8)	40	(24.5)	0		163	(99.9)
7. Met With PTA	119	(73.5)	2	(1.2)	3	(1.9)	38	(23.5)	0		162	(100.)
8. Met With Threatened Staff	117	(71.8)	2	(1.2)	4	(2.5)	39	(23.9)	1	(.6)	163	(100.)
9. Had Public Hearings	116	(71.2)	2	(1.2)	2	(1.2)	43	(26.3)	0		163	(99.9)
10. Students Visited New School	102	(62.6)	1	(.6)	1	(.6)	57	(35.0)	2	(1.2)	163	(100.)
11. Considered Busing Costs	101	(62.3)	2	(1.2)	4	(2.5)	55	(34.0)	0		162	(100.)
12. Considered Real Estate Value	99	(60.7)	2	(1.2)	3	(1.8)	59	(36.2)	0		163	(99.9)
13. Sent Information to Media	95	(58.3)	3	(1.8)	2	(1.2)	62	(38.0)	1	(.6)	163	(99.9)
14. Teacher Reassignment on Request	95	(58.3)	1	(.6)	8	(4.9)	57	(35.0)	2	(1.2)	163	(100.)
15. Advisory Committee	93	(57.1)	2	(1.2)	8	(4.9)	58	(35.6)	2	(1.2)	163	(100.)
16. Met With Union Officials	81	(50.0)	1	(.6)	3	(1.9)	76	(46.9)	1	(.6)	162	(100.)
17. Examined Private School Enrollments	69	(42.6)	2	(1.2)	2	(1.2)	88	(54.3)	1	(.6)	162	(100.)
18. Evaluated Closing Plan	46	(28.2)	1	(.6)	0		116	(71.2)	0		163	(100.)
19. Budgeted Funds	44	(27.0)	1	(.6)	4	(2.5)	114	(69.9)	0		163	(100.)
20. Conducted Community Survey	34	(21.0)	0		2	(1.2)	123	(75.9)	3	(1.9)	162	(100.)
21. Used Outside Consultants	32	(19.6)	2	(1.2)	7	(4.3)	121	(74.2)	1	(.6)	163	(99.9)
22. Established Telephone Hot-Line	19	(11.7)	0		0		142	(87.1)	2	(1.2)	163	(100.)

TABLE 9

Membership of the Advisory Committee

	(N=162) Number of Districts	Percent
No Advisory Committee	59	36.4
PTA Members	93	90.3 (a)
District Professional Staff	88	85.4 (a)
Community Leaders	64	62.1 (a)
Civic Groups	61	59.2 (a)
Volunteers	59	57.3 (a)
Other District Employees	46	44.7 (a)
Special Interest Groups	43	41.7 (a)
Religious Groups	17	16.5 (a)
Others	10	9.7 (a)

(a) Percentage of the districts having Advisory Committees.
(Missing Cases - 7)

TABLE 10

Function of the Advisory Committees

Functions	(N=163) Number of Districts	Percent
No Advisory Committee	59	36.2
To Analyze Information	87	83.7 (a)
To Gather Information	81	77.9 (a)
To Recommend a Plan	78	75.0 (a)
To Provide a Sense of Involvement	69	66.3 (a)
To Develop Guidelines for Selecting the School to Close	36	34.6 (a)
To Decide Whether to Close a School	27	26.0 (a)
To Decide Which School to Close	25	24.0 (a)
Others	9	8.7 (a)

(a) Percentage of districts having Advisory Committees.
(Missing Cases - 6)

TABLE 11

Items Included in Guidelines

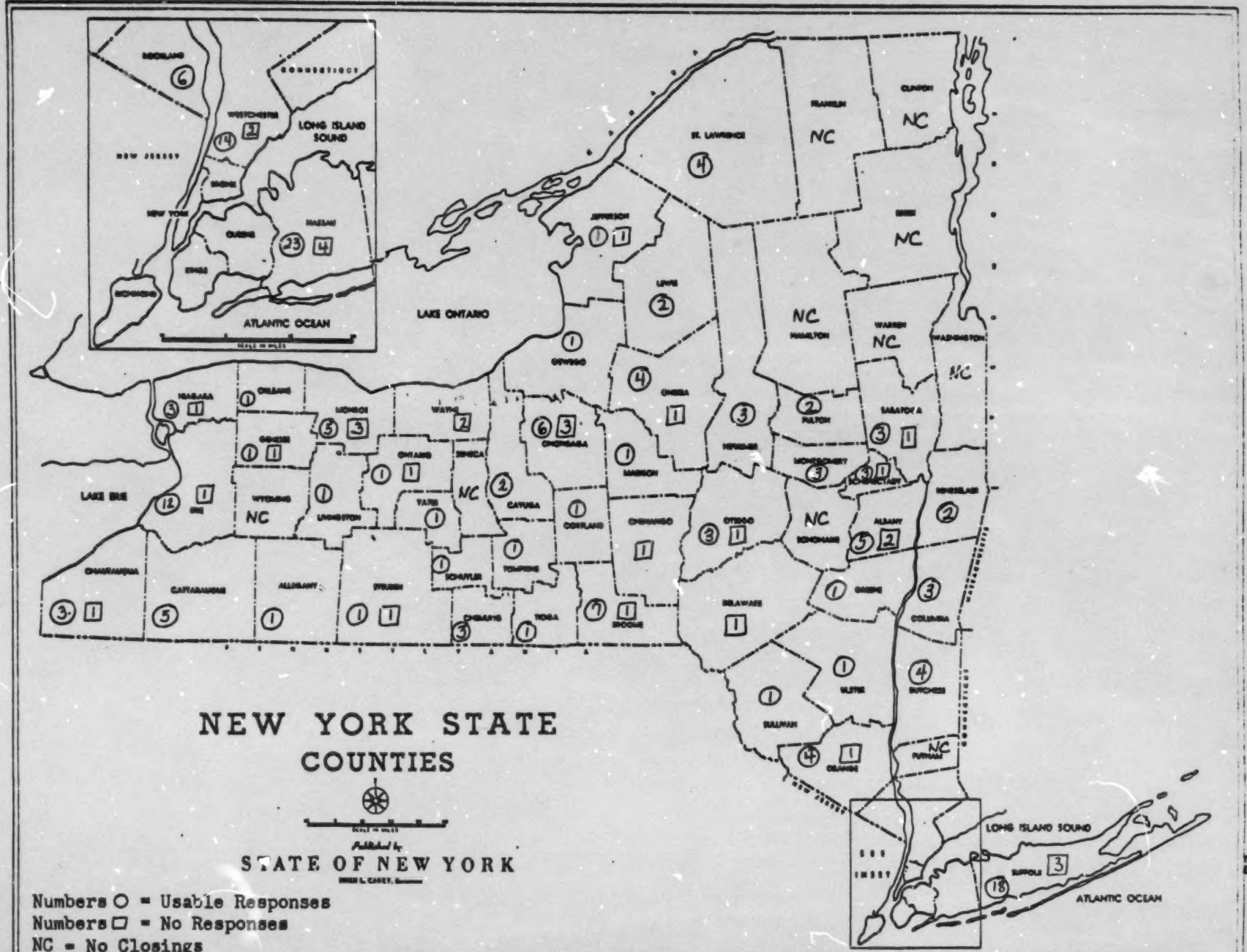
Items	(N=163) Number of Districts	Percent
No Guidelines	46	28.2
Space & Facilities in Building	101	86.3 (a)
Enrollment	101	86.3 (a)
Building Maintenance Costs	99	84.6 (a)
Condition of Building	89	76.0 (a)
Age of Building	86	73.5 (a)
Location Relative to Students' Homes	72	61.5 (a)
Desirability of Location as Real Estate	37	31.6 (a)
Real Estate Value of Property	33	28.2 (a)
Others	13	11.1 (a)

(a) Percentage of districts developing guidelines.
(Missing Cases - 6)

TABLE 12

Unanticipated Problems

	Number
Age Mix of Students	1
Busing	3
Crowded Conditions	6
Excessing Staff	1
Getting Information to Parents	1
Disposing of Building Contents	2
Population Increase	1
Public Demands for Income from Property	2
Continuation of Resistance	2
Sale of Property	9
Vandalism	3
White Flight	3
Work Required	3
Questionnaires on School Closings	1
Total (From 27 districts)	38

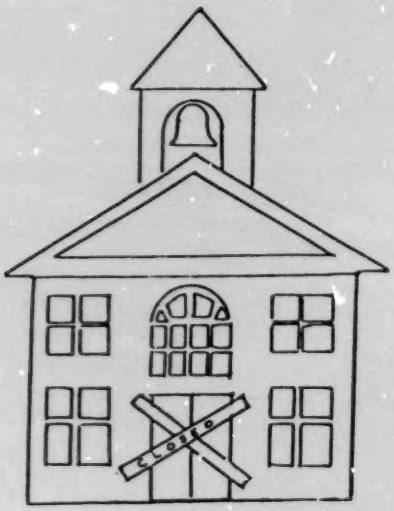


GEOGRAPHIC DISTRIBUTION OF DISTRICTS IN THE STUDY

SCHOOL CLOSINGS: THE PROCESS AND THE AFTERMATH

A Statewide Survey of New York School Districts That Have Closed Schools

Dr. Helen Foote Flowers



Conducted under the auspices of
Dr. David Gardner
Department of Administration
and Policy Studies
School of Education
Hofstra University
Hempstead, New York
May 1983

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The success of any survey project depends completely on the willingness of the survey recipients to contribute the time to complete the questionnaire. In the case of this particular study, 218 of the 252 superintendents in the sample responded. Of these, 169 provided information useful to the project. These individuals are to be congratulated for their interest in increasing the body of knowledge about declining enrollment and school closings in New York State.

I am particularly grateful to the respondents because I recognize that school superintendents as a group have more demands upon their time than most other people. Their efforts on my behalf, therefore, make me especially appreciative of their generosity.

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BACKGROUND

Data for this study were solicited by questionnaires sent to superintendents in 252 school districts in New York State (excluding New York City) listed by the New York State Education Department as having closed schools in the period September 1973 through September 1981. The 55-item (226 parts) questionnaire generated information on school closings both before September 1973 and after September 1981 that was not included on the State Education Department list. This information was incorporated into the study. Questionnaires were returned from 218 districts, making a response rate of 86.5 percent.

Of the 218 responding districts, 39 reported having no closings related to enrollment decline. Two respondents provided information in a form that could not be used; three wrote letters explaining why it was impossible for them to complete the questionnaire; two expressed unwillingness to participate in the survey; three superintendents returned blank questionnaires. Responses from 169 districts (67.1%) contained usable data upon which the findings of this 220-page study are based. The following is a summary of the findings.

THE SETTING

The largest number of responses came from the counties of Nassau (23), Suffolk (18), and Westchester (14), all in the New York City metropolitan area, and Erie County (12), in which the city of Buffalo is located. These four counties, which contain 26.6% of the districts to which questionnaires were sent,

provided 39.6% of the usable responses to the survey and have 25.6% of the state's population. Of the districts from which no responses were received (34), 29.4% (10) are in these same four counties. Of the ten counties in which no closings occurred, six are in the sparsely-populated northeastern section of the state, while the remaining four are scattered throughout the rest of the state.

WHAT CONDITIONS EXISTED IN SCHOOL DISTRICTS PRIOR TO SCHOOL CLOSINGS?

Sixty-seven percent of the districts reported that their most recent closing occurred in the last five years, with almost one-quarter taking place in the 1981-82 school year. In the most recent year with closings, 85% of the districts closed one school. Of the reporting districts, 45.5% had closed no elementary schools prior to the closing reported in this study. Elementary schools declined in number from 1046 in the responding districts in 1971 to 724 in 1981, a decrease of 30.8%. Senior high schools increased by 2.9%. More than 80% of the buildings most recently closed housed grades K-5, and of the buildings closed, almost half were constructed prior to 1930. Roughly half of the closed schools were built to house fewer than 350 students. In the last year of operation, half the buildings closed had enrollments of fewer than 250 students. Nearly 25% of the districts had moved away from a pattern of neighborhood schools. Slightly more than half the districts hoped to achieve a reduction in costs by closing a building; 97% reported they had achieved their objective.

WHAT PROCESS DID DISTRICTS USE IN PLANNING FOR CLOSINGS?

Of the activities making up the process used in planning for closings, more than 80% of the districts examined facilities, educational implications, staffing, and operating costs. Meetings with community and staff groups were held in 70-75% of the districts, while other activities of a public relations nature were engaged in to a lesser degree. Advisory committees, made up chiefly of parents and staff members, were organized in 64% of the districts. The committees' functions varied, with the largest number of districts (75-85%) reporting the gathering and/or analyzing of information and the recommendation of a plan as functions. One-third of the committees completed their tasks in six months or less, while one-quarter worked for a year. The recommendations of the committees were followed to some extent in 85% of the districts. Guidelines were developed in two-thirds of the districts. These were primarily concerned with enrollment, space, maintenance costs, age, and condition of the building to be closed.

Of the districts that had previously closed schools, 21% reported using a different procedure in this their latest closing. Half the districts had developed long-range plans for future closings.

WHAT HAPPENED FOLLOWING CLOSINGS THAT CAN BE PERCEIVED AS RESULTING FROM THE CLOSINGS?

The results indicate that of the 97% of the districts that anticipated reducing costs by closing a school, almost 80% reported cost reductions matching approximately the amount anticipated. Of the incumbent school board members running for re-election near the time of the closing (234), 70% favored the closing, but in only 22% of the districts was the closing perceived to have been an election issue, and in only 18% of the districts was it perceived to have been a factor in the outcome of the election. The manner in which the superintendent handled the closing was perceived to have been a factor in his/her leaving the position in 6% of the districts that superintendents left after the closing.

Negative community reaction to the closing occurred in 36% of the districts, although 84% had anticipated opposition and had planned strategies to minimize such reaction. The three most-often-selected reasons for opposition were students' lack of familiarity with their new schools, busing, and concern about larger classes. The opposition came almost completely from the neighborhood of the closed school and took the form of speaking at board meetings, letters and calls to board members and administrators, letters to news media, and the circulation of petitions. In half the districts the opposition came to an end by the time the school actually was closed.

Teacher opposition to closing was anticipated in 69% of the districts but actually materialized in only 41%. The most-often-selected reasons for teacher opposition were the transfer to a different school and the threats to jobs and to the educational program. Superintendents reported that teacher morale was not perceived to have been adversely affected by the school closing in 81% of the districts.

Respondents reported that students had access to a greater variety of educational programs in their new schools than in the schools that closed. Class size remained stable in 73% of the districts, while 6% of the districts reported some crowding.

The closed buildings were sold, rented, or leased in more than half the districts, and vandalism was reported as being a problem in 6% of the districts.

ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

Superintendents were asked to provide any additional information they considered might be helpful to others involved in school closings. Responses came from 23 superintendents (13%). Based on the degree of satisfaction with their own closing experiences, respondents recommended among other things avoiding the use of community planning committees, insisting on accurate data on which to base decisions, and having a plan for building utilization before closing. Some superintendents took opposing positions. One superintendent's comment, however, might be agreed upon by everyone who has been involved in school closings: "Procedures

must be flexible and designed for the particular situation".

CONCLUSIONS

Within the scope and limitations of this study the data seem to support the following conclusions:

1. Schools selected to be closed are more likely to be those housing elementary grades in facilities thirty or more years of age, with enrollments considerably smaller than those for which the buildings were originally constructed.

2. Examination of district facilities, evaluation of staffing needs, operating costs, and the educational implications of closing are the most-often-selected components of the closing process.

3. In planning for a closing, school district officials are more likely to use procedures that are the same as or similar to those used by them before. This implies satisfaction with results of the earlier closing.

4. While advantages of community involvement in the school closing process are widely discussed in the literature, over a third of the districts in this study did not organize advisory groups. In districts where such groups were formed, membership consisted largely of PTA members and district staff; their function was to gather and/or analyze information; they worked for a year or less; and their recommendations were followed to some degree.

5. Guidelines for selecting a building to close included such technical components as consideration of the space, enrollment, maintenance cost, age, and condition

of the building rather than people-oriented factors.

6. Not only did most school district officials anticipate that some reduction in operating costs would result from a school closing, but they were also likely to predict accurately the amount of the reduction.

7. Although tax rates are unlikely to decrease, residents tend to equate closings with tax-rate decreases.

8. School officials tended to overestimate the likelihood of negative community reaction to school closings. They were, however, successful in planning strategies to minimize negative reaction when it developed.

9. Race does not seem to have been a factor in negative community reaction to school closings.

10. Non-educational factors (busing, separation from friends, and lack of familiarity with the school to which students were to be transferred) were more-often-selected reasons for community opposition to closing than any others.

11. Busing was a more-often-selected reason for community opposition to closing than school officials had anticipated.

12. Opposition is likely to take the form of speaking at board meetings and communicating by letter or telephone with administrators and/or board members.

13. Opposition is more likely to come from residents of the neighborhood of the closed school than from the district at large.

14. Opposition is likely to end by the time the school is closed. In some cases, however, it may continue for a year or longer.

15. Negative reaction to school closings from teaching staffs tended to be less than was anticipated by school officials. The most-often-selected reason for staff opposition was the transfer to a different school.

16. It is unlikely that school closings will be an issue in campaigns to re-elect incumbent school board members. Nor are superintendents likely to lose their positions owing to school closings.

17. Declining enrollment at the elementary level, resulting in the consolidation of schools, tends to improve the educational program by making available more full-time staff in special areas, increasing flexibility of program and instructional offerings, and improving facility utilization.

18. The erosion of educational quality characterized by the termination at the elementary level of programs in art, music, and physical education, reported by Romantino, is not supported by this study.

19. School officials are generally able to predict accurately the amount of space to be required for educational activities after the school closing.

20. While most closed schools are sold, rented, or leased, the sale of such property is much more difficult than many school officials anticipated.

SUMMARY

Many school officials in school districts in New York State saw as their objective the reduction of costs when they closed schools. The findings of this study indicate

that they were successful in achieving this objective. While the amount of saving achieved was not specified, respondents reported that they saved, in general, the amount they had anticipated. Respondents reported the components of their closing procedures and indicated they would for the most part use these procedures in future school closings, which, in conjunction with their success in achieving their objectives, suggests satisfaction with the procedures. Educational programs were reported to have survived school closings unscathed, and community reaction usually ended without costing superintendents and board members their positions. Given that respondents reported accurately their unanticipated benefits and problems, the conclusions can be drawn that relatively few problems emerged unexpectedly, while a slightly greater number of positive by-products grew out of the school closings.